

Aides to Nixon, Hughes Plotted

By John Hanrahan

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For a few months early last year, the Watergate-conspiracy world of E. Howard Hunt Jr. and the business-intrigue world of billionaire recluse Howard Hughes converged in a plan designed to help President Nixon's reelection chances and Hughes' financial interests.

The plan involved no fancy, high-level wheeling and dealing, but rather a burglary of the office safe of Las Vegas publisher Herman M. (Hank) Greenspun.

Hunt told the Senate select Watergate committee yesterday that he and G. Gordon Liddy both plotted with a representative of Hughes' financial empire early last year to break into Greenspun's office at the Las Vegas Sun and loot his safe of documents believed to be in Greenspun's possession.

Liddy and ex-CIA agent Hunt, both convicted in January for the break-in and bugging of Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate, hoped to find information that would be politically damaging to Sen. Edmund Muskie (D-Maine), Hunt said.

Muskie at the time was the front runner for the Democratic presidential nomination and was widely regarded as the biggest threat to Mr. Nixon's reelection chances. Rumor had it that Greenspun had damaging material on Muskie, Hunt said.

Hughes at the time was (and still is) the defendant in a libel suit brought by his former corporate aide, Robert Maheu, and it had been widely reported that Greenspun also had memos exchanged by Hughes and Maheu.

After the first of two meetings with Hughes' security chief Ralph Winte, it was decided there was a "commonality" of interest in burglarizing Greenspun's safe, Hunt said. Later, he and Liddy met with Winte in Los Angeles to discuss the break-in plan further. (Winte refused to comment on the testimony, referring all calls to a spokesman for the Hughes company.)

Hunt said the burglary was never carried out but, if it had been, he and his superiors would have kept what interested them, and Hughes' people would have kept what was helpful to them.

What exactly was in Greenspun's safe?

Greenspun himself refuses to say, but there are

clues and hints from news articles that have appeared in his paper, and in the columns of his friend, syndicated columnist Jack Anderson. Greenspun will not say how he obtained the memos, but it is widely suspected in the Hughes camp that Maheu gave them to him.

All Greenspun will say about the documents in his possession is that he has nothing damaging on Muskie. The only document pertaining to Muskie tells of Muskie's arrest in 1965 for a minor hunting violation, Greenspun said in a recent telephone interview with The Washington Post.

In some of the articles by Greenspun and Anderson relating to the Hughes' interest, the names of President Nixon, his brother, F. Donald Nixon, and his closest confidant, Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo, have surfaced.

For example, Anderson printed columns in 1971 and early 1972 that stated that:

- A \$100,000 payment passed from a Hughes' lieutenant, Richard Danner, operator of Hughes' Silver Slipper gambling casino in Las Vegas, to Rebozo in 1968.

- Hughes hoped to heavily underwrite Mr. Nixon's 1968 campaign in an effort to put the President in Hughes debt for future favors.

- The White House was unhappy with Donald Nixon's close association with Hughes' aide John H. Meier, and Rebozo once intervened to tell the Hughes firm to keep Meier away from Donald Nixon.

Hunt did not say yesterday if there was any interest in obtaining possible documents in connection with the above allegations.

Meier was eventually fired by Hughes, and it was recently reported by The Washington Post that the Secret Service, at the direction of President Nixon, had wiretapped the telephone of his brother Donald because, according to informed sources, he feared embarrassment from Donald Nixon's involvement with the Hughes empire and other businesses. The White House later stated that such surveillance was maintained on the President's "immediate family" by the Secret Service as a security precaution.

Meier was indicted by a federal grand jury in Reno last month on income tax evasion charges growing out of an investigation of the sale of Nevada mining claims to Hughes. Four

other persons also have been indicted in the case, and an Internal Revenue Service source said more indictments are expected.

The Greenspun burglary plan had been touched on only briefly in earlier testimony before the Senate Watergate committee by Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr. and former deputy Nixon campaign manager, Jeb Stuart Magruder. Hunt's testimony yesterday was the first sworn, public statement on the matter by a principal in the plan.

Hunt testified yesterday that he had been told by his former business associate, Robert F. Bennett, that Bennett had heard a rumor that Greenspun's safe contained information that was potentially damaging to Muskie.

Hunt, in an earlier interview with the Senate committee staff, indicated that Liddy was in charge of the Greenspun burglary plan and said he believed Liddy was taking his orders from then-U.S. Attorney General John N. Mitchell and then deputy Nixon campaign manager, Jeb Stuart Magruder.

Joint Las Vegas

Burglary

Las Vegas publisher Greenspun said in a recent telephone interview that he thought the Nixon aides were concerned about information he had because of the news articles using the Hughes' memos, as well as conversations he said he had in late 1971 with Herbert G. Klein, then the President's director of communications, and Herbert W. Kalmbach, the President's personal attorney.

Greenspun said he talked to Klein after a Klein speech in Portland, Oregon, in September, 1971. "I asked him (Klein) about a large contribution in cash by the Hughes' interests here (Las Vegas) or the supposed agents of Hughes," Greenspun said. "He (Klein) said he didn't know about it, but he would ask about it."

Greenspun said he was called a short time later by Herbert W. Kalmbach, the President's personal attorney who had handled the acquisition of the Western White House property at San Clemente, Calif., for Mr. Nixon. Kalmbach then came to Las Vegas to see Greenspun.

"I asked Herb (Kalmbach) whether this (Hughes)



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr., left, Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr., center, and counsel Samuel Dash at hearing yesterday

money went to purchase a certain place (the San Clemente property) in California," Greenspun said. "He denied it emphatically. He said the books on that are open and he assured me that no campaign money went into it."

Kalmbach's attorney, James O'Connor, confirmed in a recent telephone interview that Kalmbach assured Greenspun in late 1971 that no campaign funds were used to purchase the San Clemente property.

Kalmbach, a key fundraiser in the 1968 and 1972 Nixon campaigns, was entrusted with almost \$2 million in leftover campaign funds after the 1968 campaign. O'Connor said that Kalmbach has not been asked by any investigator "and probably doesn't know what happened to the \$100,000" from Danner.

Klein, in a recent telephone interview, said he recalled having "a brief conversation" with Greenspun in Portland, Ore., in late 1971 but "what we discussed, I don't recall. I certainly don't recall any discussion of Howard Hughes or Donald Nixon." Klein said he re-

called hearing that Kalmbach later visited Greenspun, "but what the subject was, or how they got together, I don't recall."

Greenspun says he never learned what happened to the purported \$100,000 from Danner, the Silver Slipper operator.

"The \$100,000 went from the cage of the Silver Slipper to Rebozo," Greenspun said. "What happened to it after that, I don't know."

The Silver Slipper is a Las Vegas gambling casino personally owned, rather than corporately owned, by Hughes. Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson, who first reported on the alleged Hughes' donation on Aug. 6, 1971, wrote that the money did not pass through Hughes' corporate books.

Hughes, who is on record as contributing \$100,000 to the Nixon campaign in 1972, was not required under the law in existence in 1968 to have any payments publicly reported. (Danner was called a half-dozen times by The Post and did not return the calls. Rebozo could not be located.)

Greenspun said he feels his late 1971 conversations

with Klein and Kalmbach may have tipped off the White House that he might have information that could be potentially embarrassing politically to President Nixon. He said his office was, in fact, broken into in the spring or summer of 1972 and an unsuccessful attempt was made to forcibly enter his safe. He said he does not know who the burglars were.

According to Hughes' spokesman Richard Hannah, the Hughes' memos began surfacing around Las Vegas after Robert Maheu's ouster as operator of all of Hughes' Las Vegas gambling enterprises in late 1970. Upon leaving his office, Maheu reportedly removed hundreds of memos, most of them in Hughes' own handwriting.

Copies of some of Hughes' memos have found their way to Washington.

The Post obtained copies of three memos from Benjamin F. Schemmer and viewed copies of several other memos in Schemmer's possession. Schemmer, editor of the Armed Forces Journal here in Washington and a leading authority on Hughes, says the memos are authentic.

One of the memos obtained by the Post, handwritten sometime in March, 1968, purportedly by Hughes to Maheu, details Hughes' concern over increasing criticism of his acquisition of casinos in Las Vegas. It speaks of having Maheu "go to see Nixon as my special confidential emissary. I feel there is a really valid possibility of a Republican victory this year. If that could be realized under our sponsorship and supervision every inch of the way, then we would be ready to follow with Laxalt as our next candidate." (Laxalt is Paul Laxalt, who was then the governor of Nevada.)

The memo goes on to say that "I agree we can win this hassle" over acquiring another casino on the Las Vegas strip, but suggests proceeding cautiously.

At the time, Hughes was planning to purchase the Stardust, a hotel-casino on the Las Vegas strip. The Justice Department blocked the transaction in June, 1968. Memos viewed by the Post show that Hughes was seriously concerned at the time, not only with the anti-trust action against him, but with his effort to try to end atomic testing in Nevada.

The prohibition against Hughes acquiring additional Las Vegas casinos was later

lifted to permit him to acquire the Landmark, a building that had been built by someone else but never opened. The acquisition was authorized by the Justice Department in the waning days of the Johnson administration. Hughes has acquired no other Las Vegas casinos since then, leaving him with five casino hotels and one casino in that city.

It is not clear from the memos if Hughes ever made up his mind on which candidate to support for President in 1968, but the memos indicate he was out to back most heavily the candidate who would best help him with his antitrust and atomic testing problems. In one memo, dated April 17, 1968, Hughes writes Maheu:

"I am sort of anxious to know whom we are going to support for President and how much, because I believe these others you mention should bear some relationship to our contribution toward the White House candidate."

It was memos of this type that Greenspun had stated publicly he had in his safe. Rumors concerning Greenspun's memos led to the formulation of the break-in plan at Greenspun's office, Robert F. Bennett told The Post last week.

Bennett, president of the Robert R. Mullen Co., a Washington public relations firm that handles an account for Hughes' interests, worked with Hunt, who had been a vice president and then a consultant at the Mullen firm.

Bennett told The Post that Hunt, while serving as both a consultant to the White House and to the Mullen firm, mentioned in late 1971 or early 1972 the possibility of breaking into Greenspun's safe.

Bennett said Hunt told him that Greenspun had "said to a friend, 'don't worry about Muskie, I've got enough in my safe on him to blow him out of the water.' I asked him, 'Howard, who is your source?' He said 'all I can say is that the source of my information is so high, I can only assume the information is from a wiretap.' When I heard that, I knew that the FBI was authorized to wiretap by the Justice Department and my reaction was that this had come from (then Attorney John) Mitchell."

Bennett said, "It seemed logical they would be wiretapping Greenspun because after all he is a convicted felon." (Greenspun was convicted in 1950 of illegally sending arms to Israel.)